

The Extent of the Gospel

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – God sovereignly purposes where the gospel is preached only by his good pleasure
2. aim – to cause us to be eternally grateful for being in a place where God has purposed the gospel
3. passage – Acts 16:6-10

b. outline

1. The Progressive Extent of the Gospel
2. The Sovereign Extent of the Gospel
3. The Real Extent of the Gospel

c. opening

1. a *reintroduction* to Chapter 20
 - a. this chapter addresses a *particularly unique issue* rising in the W which could/would have *devastating effects* on the propagation and value of the gospel (*i.e.* its extent)
 - b. specifically, the rise of reason and science (rationalism) leading men to think that they could “figure out” God: observing the natural world to “discover” God for themselves *and what he ought to be*
2. the first paragraph starts the chapter by stating a fundamental fact: God has announced, because of the broken covenant of works by Adam, a promise (in the gospel) of a “last” Adam who would come to accomplish all that the first Adam failed to do, and that all who are the recipients of this promise are connected to this Christ by repentance and faith
3. the second paragraph addresses the issue above *head-on*: although the general revelation of nature and the *Imago Dei* imbues humanity with an *inherent* knowledge of the existence of a Creator, that general revelation fails to bring fallen humans to a *saving* knowledge of God, thus a special revelation of the Word of God is required, “beyond” or “above” the Created Order
4. the third paragraph becomes the *key of the entire chapter*: what is the *extent* of the special revelation God has given – *where* does this gospel message go, and *why does it go there?*
 - a. **note**: the paragraph is extremely difficult (in old English) – we must go through it line-by-line

I. The Progressive Extent of the Gospel

Content

a. the progressive revelation of the gospel

“the revelation of the gospel unto sinners, made in divers times and by sundry parts, with the addition of promises and precepts for the obedience required therein ...”

1. “*made in divers times and sundry parts*” = the revelation *initially* made of the promise of God (**Genesis 3:15**) was *progressively revealed to humanity through time*
 - a. the initial promise was *extremely vague* – it promised only a “seed” (a specific person) that would come and “defeat” the Tempter – *i.e.* a man coming from the line of Eve to destroy Satan
 - b. the promise (then) was *progressively revealed* through the course of *written history*
 1. (**again**) not just in the “nature” of history itself, where men could “figure it out” – rather, through the *written* Scriptures which “made sense” out of the history itself
 - c. through the early Genesis account (*i.e.* Cain & Abel, the flood, etc.) – a picture of the results of the Fall in the human condition; the *rebellion* of man and his *desperation*
 - d. through the patriarchs – the first to [re]enter into *relationship* with the Creator, and to receive *directly* his promise to bless them and bring the “seed” through their line
 - e. through the history of Israel – the nation specifically in *relationship* with the Creator, carrying all of the *foreshadowing* and *typology* of who the “seed” would be and what he would do
 1. **e.g.** the sacrificial system pointing to the Christ as the ultimate high priest before God
 - f. through the Incarnation of the Christ – the actual coming of the “seed”, to accomplish the work of being the “last” Adam, righting the Curse, and establishing a new race in himself
 - g. through the early church age – the “final act” of revelation, where the Spirit of the Christ inspired men to “comment” on the life and death of the Christ, and how all of it fulfills the promise of God
 - h. **IOW**: the promise of God came to man at various times and in various ways, but (now) the whole of it has been revealed *in the Scriptures* – the promise of the gospel has now been fully made known “over” and “above” the Created Order in a *special revelation*

2. “with the addition of promises and precepts” = this progressive revelation not only “fleshed out” what the promise of God was, but also revealed how men could receive the benefits of that promise
 - a. **e.g.** the giving of the law – although a revelation of the nature of God himself (**i.e.** his holiness), and a revelation of what is required of man to have relationship with God (**i.e.** obedience), the law was also a “schoolmaster” (“guardian”, **Galatians 3:24**) – teaching men to abandon their failed “self-righteousness” and come to God *entirely by faith* (**Romans 4:3**)
3. **principle: the original promise of God is progressively revealed to humanity through the inspired Word of God – it started out as a simple promise to defeat the devil, it progressed into a full revelation of all that God would do through his “seed” to accomplish that goal and how those who receive that promise enter into its requirements**
 - a. it *did not* just “come” to us by “thinking it through” – it required a revelation, and God chose to bring this revelation to humanity bit-by-bit over time, using history and people along the way

II. The Sovereign Extent of the Gospel

Content

a. the sovereign will of God as to the extent of the gospel

“... as to the nations and persons to whom it is granted, is merely of the sovereign will and good pleasure of God”

1. “as to the nations and persons to whom it is granted” – **question:** so, to whom does this promise go; has God promised to deliver this message to every single human being on the planet?
 - a. **answer:** it goes out *specifically* to those who are chosen to receive it by “the sovereign will and good pleasure of God” – not to *everyone*, but those *sovereignly chosen to receive it*
 - b. note the connection to *progressive revelation*: there were many peoples, *even up to the present age*, that never received *any* revelation of God in accordance with this original promise
 1. no one *prior* to Abraham had any *significant* revelation of these matters; the patriarchs had *extremely limited* understanding (**i.e.** only enough to believe God; **Hebrews 11:13**), no other nations around Israel received any writings, law, sacrificial systems, prophets, etc., Jesus never preached in Rome, and even in the early church age, the gospel was limited to where it was sent (**see Acts 16:6-10 as a narrative example**)
 - a. **e.g.** Paul desired to travel from W Asia Minor back into Bithynia (to the NE), but was *directly hindered* by the Spirit, called from across the Aegean by a man in Macedonia (Greece)
 - b. **IOW:** the historical event demonstrates that God orchestrates where his gospel goes
 2. even today, more than 2000 languages around the world are still waiting for a translation project to begin (Wycliffe Bible Translators, www.wycliffe.org/about/why, 2019) – this special revelation has not (yet) come to them *nor is there any promise that it will come to them*

b. the limiting nature of man as to the extent of the gospel

“not being annexed by virtue of any promise to the due improvement of men’s natural abilities, by virtue of common light receive without it, which none ever did make, or can do so”

1. and, God has not made any promise that, as men become “smarter” in understanding the things of the *natural* world, that this would then reveal his means of salvation to them
 - a. **i.e.** just because we are able to use science to improve our lot, this doesn’t mean that God becomes “obligated” (then) to make the promise known to us, or
 - b. **i.e.** just because we are able to use science to improve our understanding, this doesn’t mean that we will suddenly “discover” the way to God through it
 - c. **note:** this is the *point* of the chapter – the advancement of “common light” (enlightenment) through the use of science and reason does not “open our minds” to what it means to have a relationship with the Creator
 1. **pun:** all evidence to the contrary – science has *blinded* men to their Creator, even though *observation* has clearly demonstrated more and more of his nature (“none ever did make”)
2. **principle: the promise of God, progressively revealed in his Word, does not go out into the world through the advancement of mankind, but only as the sovereign God wills it to**
 - a. true, God *can* use the advancement of men to aid in this process (**e.g.** technology), but such advancement does not *obligate* God to use it or to “blanket” the earth with his gospel
 - b. **IOW:** although the enlightenment would see *great advancements* of humanity in science and technology, the writers of the Confession want to be clear that those advancements will never substitute for a *special revelation* – humanity must never become so “proudful” as to think it *warrants* God’s grace simply because it has become “smarter” about the Creation

III. The Real Extent of the Gospel

Content

a. the real extent of the gospel

"and therefore in all ages, the preaching of the gospel has been granted unto persons and nations, as to the extent or straitening of it, in great variety, according to the counsel of the will of God"

1. **note:** the final "sentence" simply repeats and summarizes the whole of the paragraph
 - a. those who have received the "preaching of the gospel," the extent to where it goes in the world, is only "according to the counsel of the will of God"
 - b. God decides when, where, and how his message goes into the world, and who hears it
 - c. true, God has used a "great variety" of means and men to send this message out, but its *final location* is always up to the decretive will of God
2. implying (given the historical reality above): that God also decides **where it does not go**
 - a. **question #1:** why *hasn't* God sent his gospel to *everyone*; why has he *limited* its scope?
 - b. **question #2:** why *has* God sent his gospel *here*; why do *we* have it while others do not? (**unfair?**)
 1. obvious answer: some things are simply "beyond" us (and always will be; **Deut. 29:29**)
 - a. **that's why we need a special revelation!!**
 2. another answer: there is *nothing inherent* in us that justifies *any of us* receiving the good news of a Savior and the opportunity to repent and believe (God is free to reject us all)
 3. **right answer: as those who live in a land where God has freely given his gospel promise, our duty is to love that revelation, to pore over it to understand all that God has revealed, and fall on our knees in utter gratitude for the grace granted to us in receiving it**
 - a. **i.e.** Of the Gospel and of the Extent of the **Grace** Thereof